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Janitors Beat Back Academic Goosestep

By Susan Davis

In this ritzy suburb of San Diego, fifty janitors fighting for union representation have overcome stiff opposition, not only from their subcontractor employer, but also from the highest levels of academe. These men and women who clean offices, classrooms and bathrooms at the University of California, San Diego have been fired, abused, spied on and threatened with investigation by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, an illegal labor practice, simply for trying to hold a union election.

And they've emerged victorious.

It all started with Alejandra Rodriguez, hired by Bergenson's Property Services to work as a custodian for $6.25 an hour. Everyone liked Alejandra Rodriguez, and by all accounts she did fine work; the problems came up when Bergenson's spies found out she was attending organizing meetings. On April 25 of this year, at a "captive audience" session designed to deflect the drive by the Service Employees International Union Local 2028, Alejandra Rodriguez spoke out about safety and working conditions. She was fired by Bergenson the next day in a humiliating scene. After she was yelled at and her check thrown at her in front of staff and faculty, she was led away by campus police.

All janitors at UCSD were university employees until the big privatization wave of the 1990s. When the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees organized the janitors in 1995, UCSD started dealing with non-union subcontractors to trim costs. About one hundred custodians work for between $11.00- $12.00 hourly under an AFSCME contract, while nearly as many are supplied by firms like Bergenson's, a low paid, over-worked, benefits-free second tier of people who do the identical tasks.

Alejandra Rodriguez worked a second eight-hour shift to keep her family going, as do some UCSD secretaries. And this two-tiered structure is just like the faculty, come to think of it, among whom "adjunct" (non-tenurable, temporary) teachers work much harder than the tenure-track professors, for much worse pay and, often, no benefits.

Victorious inside the city limits last year, the SEIU has been running a vigorous Living Wage and Justice for Janitors campaign in the sprawling suburbs where so many office buildings - and several Universities - are located. But it's tough in such an anti-union town. City fathers nearly lynched Alexander Reitman and the Wobbly free-speechers in 1912 and it's been hostile territory for labor rights ever since.

What happened to Alejandra Rodriguez? Rodriguez galvanized the Justice for Janitors campaign on campus, and especially the group Students for Economic Justice. They were well aware that her complaint against Bergenson's was only the latest of many at UCSD: the company is notorious for abusing its workers. These activists demanded to speak with Chancellor Robert Dynes (boss of all the bosses) about her treatment. They wrote, they phoned, they collected 900 signatures on a petition- and never got so much as a return phone call.

So when they heard that Dynes was holding a gathering of his Chancellor's Associates (wealthy donors) they decided to see if they could catch up with him there. The May 22 meeting was held in an outdoor hospitality tent, and at first the activ-

(**Janitors** *continued on page 5*)

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Our Little Secrets

Real Politics and the Jeffords Jump: Was the Bush White House Truly Sorry?

Even as a maddened lobbyist for the National Homebuilders' Association threatened to shoot Jim Jeffords, some astute Republicans on the Hill are offering a different interpretation of how the Bush White House sees the loss of its majority in the Senate.

By late May, Jeffords was tensing to make his leap towards independence, and asking what he might expect if he stayed loyal. Instead of frantic blandishments and brawnier subsidies for Vermont's dairymen, Acting President Cheney and White House hatchetman Karl Rove told Jeffords to get lost. These men aren't that stupid. According to one seasoned observer on the Hill, they were making the following calculations: the tax bill, crucial for Bush and Republican credibility, was a done deal. Jeffords had pledged to vote for it, and not to quit the party officially till after the bill had passed the Senate. And on that same tax bill the Democrats had surrendered their filibustering power. Looking ahead, Cheney and Rove saw slumping poll numbers as the Bush White House pays the cost for its monumental tactical blunders (well, okay, they can be pretty stupid) on environmental and energy issues, with no relief in sight until the Congress would probably turn over to the Democrats in 2002.

So, if the Senate was set to change hands, far better to allow Republican odium to fall upon the treacherous Vermonter Jeffords rather than have the turnover ascribed to popular hostility to Bush. The White House also calculated that over the next eighteen months they could blame inaction on the intransigence of Daschle and his fellow Democrats in the Senate. Bush, it seems, entertains a hearty dislike for erstwhile senate majority leader Trent Lott, an animus dating at least to the time when candidate Bush unveiled his original tax cut plan, tricked out with compassionate disbursements to the working poor, and Lott publicly derided it to the press. So Lott loses his slot as majority leader and may now face a challenge as minority leader from oil patch Oklahoman and Bush ally, Senator Don Nickles.

Meanwhile the Bush White House can now adopt Clinton's White House strategy after the Republicans captured Congress in 1995 and he came back from the dead with the strategy known as "triangulation", whereby you run some of the time against your own party and make deals with factions in the opposition. That's the way Bush worked as governor in Texas. And now, if he wants some movement on health reform (on prescription drugs and a patients' bill of rights) the only way Bush can advance on these fronts is by doing deals with Democrats.

So, on this analysis, the White House had, in the argot of Clintontime, a win-win scenario. Let Jeffords go, if necessary with a helping push.

All the way through the 2000 campaign, Democrats sought to chasten Nader supporters with the dread specter of a Republican President, backed by a Republican Congress. And, with Bush's stolen election, and the gerrymandering of the black vote, that is what the nation got. But those fearmongering Democrats were ignoring the central fact, repeatedly emphasized by Naderites, that political realities have little to do with the supposed agendas of our main political parties.

This became plain in the earliest hours of Republican rule in Washington when Daschle announced there would be no filibuster against the nomination of Ashcroft as Attorney General and when Feingold of Wisconsin, probably the most liberal Democratic senator on many issues, actually voted for the racist, death-penalty-loving Missourian. Simultaneously the Bush White House realised that its cherished plan to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge wasn't even going to get out of the House Interior Committee, controlled by conservative Republicans and chaired by Jim Hansen of Utah.

By April Bush's hopes for allocation of federal money to faith-based groups lay in rubble, as do now the core elements of his education plan. On Social Security Republicans are doing exactly what Clinton did, establishing a blue ribbon panel which will spend many months mooting notions for ways in which the system can be "reformed" to benefit the mutual funds industry, just as Clinton's blue ribbon panel did. And as previously, inaction will follow, since Social Security remains the third rail in American politics.

With Democrats now controlling the Senate, life can proceed exactly as it did in the Clinton era, with roughly the same judicial appointments, the same savage posture towards the poor, the imprisoned and the condemned, and the same open-handed generosity towards the corporations. To top it off, the Senate Majority leader Tom Daschle has promised no investigation of financial malfeasance by Karl Rove or Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill.

U2: Lousy Sound, Lousy Friends

U2's Bono and the boys have been acting as frontmen for the salutary plan backed by Jubilee 2000 to retire Third World debt. That should be a plus, till you find out who Bono's friends are.

Before he decided to take on the debt crusade Bono let it slip that he thought he needed to be tutored in the finer points of global capitalism. The man he sought out was none other than Jeffrey Sachs, the Harvard prof who helped devise the "shock therapy" scheme that pillaged the Russian economy, left millions in poverty, and made billionaires out of a few insiders who were primed to capitalize on the privatization of federal assets.

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Jesse Helms and Bono became fast friends a year ago, when the U2 lead singer visited the old racist to talk about third world debt.

Bono was the Class Day speaker for Harvard's graduation ceremonies. He said that he and Sachs had become friends in 1999. "Jeffrey Sachs not only let me into his office, he let me into his Rolodex, his head and his life for the last few years," Bono said. "Sachs and I, with my friend Bobby Shriver [Eunice Kennedy Shriver's son] hit the road like some sort of surreal crossover act. A rock star, a Kennedy, a noted economist criss-crossing the globe like the Partridge family on psychotropic drugs."

Bono's heart may be in the right place on international debt, but Sachs hasn't changed. He's the same old neo-liberal and his approach toward debt issues is the same old Faustian bargain—debt will be forgiven if those nations agree to privatize their natural resources: water, natural gas, timber, minerals.

Bono also embraced new Harvard President, Lawrence Summers, praising Summers' tenure as the former Treasury Secretary during Clintontime, the man who once affixed his signature to a World Bank memo calling Africa an "under polluted" continent and suggested that "more migration of dirty industries" to the Third World would be preferable because demand for environmental protection is smaller in countries with low wages and high mortality rates.

Bono and his band left Boston for Raleigh, North Carolina, where he invited his pal Jesse Helms backstage. It was Helms' first rock concert. The old racist said that he and Bono had become fast friends a year ago when Bono visited Helms to talk about third world debt. "I don't see how Bono lasts physically," Helms said. "He runs and skips and just goes and goes. When Bono shook his hips, that crowd shook their hips."

We've never had much regard for Bono and U2. As regards their home turf, they've been cowardly on Republican issues, and furthermore are Chrstian zealots. Other than one duet with B.B. King, "When Love Comes to Town," U2's music has always been annoyingly coy, soulless and repetitive. Keith Richards at least came up with three or four different riffs, which he has reconfigured for the last 30 years, but guitarist Edge has been shamelessly recycling the same droning sound since the late 1980s.

SCAMS DENTISTS PULL
BY BECKY GRANT

Some of us dread a visit to the dentist because of the pain, but most of us fear a stout bill. More often than not, beyond the usual x-ray and cleaning, you can anticipate a follow-up appointment to get some work done, unless you've been really good flossing and brushing a few times a day and eating teeth-friendly food. Marlene, office manager for Dr. Robert Parks, DDS in Fortuna, California says to be aware, many times, what the dentist prescribes isn't necessary. Dental scams are big.

I've been really lucky and have never had any cavities, so when a dentist told me I needed a retainer to get rid of an "unsightly" space in my front teeth, I just figured that it was my turn to have a little dental work done. I always adored the Lauren Hutton-like space, but the dentist said it would only continue to widen and would eventually lose its celebrity appeal. I believed him, and suffered a year in a medieval torture apparatus called a retainer, only to have the space open back up, but on the sides of my bicuspids, ruining my Madonna-esque smile.

When my sons Nick and Alex were toddlers, I was told by my dentist it was time for their first check-up, whereupon he referred me to a pediatric dentist. At the appointment I was promptly informed that I wouldn't be allowed to escort my wee boys into the chair, although they'd never even been in a dentist's office. The hygienist said it was for the best, claiming that children behave better when they aren't accompanied by their parents.

After the unbearable wait, the dentist announced that Alex's teeth looked great, but Nick would have to come back. Along with an appointment card, I was given a prescription for a sedative that Nick would need to take for his follow-up appointment. "It's standard procedure", the receptionist said, "the dentist doesn't work on children without it." A week later I walked out of the pediatric dental office carrying my drunken child with a mouthful of metal and a huge bill.

My husband Dave's next visit to the dentist was equally disheartening. He didn't have any cavities, but they told him his gums had receded near the point of tooth loss and he'd need gum grafts. Besides being an excruciatingly painful operation, the cost was $1,800 and wasn't covered by insurance. We were given a referral to a dental surgeon, but decided we'd get a second opinion instead. Good thing. Dave's gums are healthy and his teeth are in no danger of falling out. We found that the cause for his slightly receded gums were from the braces he wore for three years as a teenager, when he'd have to crank a device installed in his upper jaw nightly, forcing his teeth apart.

When Nick and Alex went to a dentist out of town, he said they'd need to come back to take care of one cavity in Nick's mouth and three in Alex's. He also charged for the new sealants he put on their teeth. When I took them to our present dentist for a second opinion, he found that no new sealants had been done, Nick had no cavities, and Alex had only one small hole in an older sealant, which he'd keep an eye on, but probably wouldn't need any intervention. He said that plenty of times dentists will drill and fill unnecessarily.

According to Marlene, when kids go away to college they send mom and dad big bills not only for their books, but also for their teeth. The folks are astounded at the number of dental problems their young scholar has developed, but usually mark it off to poor diet and the stresses of college life. It's an easy one to fall for, and some dentists take advantage of it.

Generally it's not a bad idea to go in for a cleaning two times a year, which keeps gum recession at bay, especially if you have a history of dental problems or if you're a lousy flosser, which many of us are.

Editors' note. Cockburn (who has bought countless dentists their Porsches and BMWs) and St Clair (who hides under his desk when the word "dentist" is mentioned) are proud of the fact that CounterPunch has a business manager with NO cavities and NO fear of dentists. So, if your sub is about to expire, or you want to take out a new one for a friend, call Becky at 1-800-840-3683 and you'll be able to hear that dazzling smile down the phone line. CP

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From the Bloodbaths of East Timor to Washington, DC

A Suicide in Alexandria

Sandra Jenkins woke up at about 6 am on a muggy June morning out side Washington, DC in 1999 to find a note from her husband on the night-table beside the bed. "Spread my ashes at our house in Fadden." She called a friend and told her, "I think Merv has done something to himself". The friend told Sandra that she had to go find him before the kids did.

"I went downstairs", recalled Sandra to the Australian news program Four Corners, earlier this year. "I was hoping to find him asleep on the sofa. Maybe he'd taken some sleeping pills. But he wasn't there. I opened the Venetian blinds and I saw him standing outside. I thought he was standing. But something wasn't right. I followed his body down and he was…he was hanging."

The man at the end of the rope was Merv Jenkins, a top intelligence officer with the Australian security forces. He had killed himself on his birthday at his home on Spy Hill, in Arlington, Virginia.

His wife, Sandra, believes that Merv was driven to suicide by the CIA. The story, which has received no press attention in the US, involves the complex and bloody relationship between US and Australian intelligence agencies, the Indonesia military and East Timor.

Jenkins was one of Australia's top covert operatives. He had led the Australian special forces group, known as the 660 Signal Troop, which coordinated communications for numerous operations inside East Timor, when Australian forces were essentially working as hired guns for Suharto and the CIA. Later Jenkins became the commanding officer for Australia's electronic warfare department.

Then in 1996 Jenkins got what he thought was his dream job: top liaison between Australia's Defense Intelligence Organization and the US's CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency. In this position, Jenkins was supposed to pass on satellite imagery and intercepted communications from Indonesia to the Americans.

Jenkins arrived in Washington at a fraught moment. Despite the best efforts of the CIA and the Australian military, the Suharto regime was beginning to crumble and the independence movement inside East Timor was once again gaining momentum and being countered with increasingly vicious reprisals by Indonesian troops, acting on intelligence provided by US and Australian sources.

The CIA repeatedly carped that the intelligence coming from Australia on Indonesia matters, including East Timor, was "insufficiently detailed" and "too anodyne" in nature. The Agency threatened Jenkins that if things didn't improve they were going to cut the Aussies off from the intelligence gathered at Pine Gap, the satellite control complex outside Alice Springs, which eavesdrops on Iraq, Indonesia, Afghanistan, India and China.

"Merv was angry because the CIA was upset that he wasn't passing over more information that they really required, and that they, the CIA, expected a lot more out of Australia. They expected a lot more information", Peter Czeti, a former intelligence officer at the Australian embassy in DC, told the Canberra Times. " We would be requested for intelligence material by our allies on numerous occasions…We would make those requests and send them back to Australia and they would sit there. And I mean for months, years. And they were never fulfilled. And these were areas that we were experts in, so there's no reason why we couldn't have provided the material. It's just that it never happened."

The man at the end of the rope was Merv Jenkins, a top intelligence officer with the Australian security forces.

In fact, there were plenty of reasons why the Australian intelligence agencies may have been reluctant to turn over detailed intelligence reports on the operations of the Aussie military in East Timor. During Clintontime, the Australians had largely become a surrogate for US operatives in the region, even as Clinton moved to distance the administration from the collapsing Suharto regime and the rampages of the Indonesian military.

For example, in May Captain Andrew Plunkett, an intelligence officer for the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, who served in East Timor said that the Australian intelligence agencies instructed his and other units to conceal evidence of war crimes by the Indonesian army and militias.

Plunkett, who now faces prosecution for violating government secrecy laws, charges that the Australian military ignored intelligence reports about the impending massacre at a police station in the East Timor border town of Maliana in September, 1999. "Australian intelligence sources had accurately reported on Indonesian plans to kill independence supporters in Maliana, but those reports were pushed up the chain of command, hosed down and politically wordsmithed by the Asia Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade", Plunkett told the Australian TV show Dateline on May 9 of this year. "None of this information was passed on to the UN troops on the ground."

When Indonesian militias attacked independence demonstrators in and around Maliana, the UN told the people to go to the local police station where they would be protected by Indonesian police. Instead, the police and Indonesian soldiers trapped several thousand people on the police grounds and allowed militiamen to hack at least 47 people to death with machetes.

Plunkett, who was assigned the task of examining mass graves, also said that Australian soldiers were instructed to undercount the death toll. The official death count at Maliana was 12. But Plunkett says that the Australians and the UN knew that many of the bodies had been put in mass graves or dumped in rivers or the ocean. Plunkett says that he examined more than 60 bodies himself in the Maliana area.

It was precisely this kind of information on the situation in East Timor prior to the independence referendum that the CIA

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The Australian military ignored intelligence reports about the impending massacre of 50 people at a police station in the East Timor border town of Maliana in September 1999.

was pressuring Merv Jenkins to pass along. In May of 1999, Jenkins came across an AUSTEO (Australian Eyes Only Document) cable from the Department of Foreign Affairs describing the activities of the Indonesian militias and troops in East Timor. Jenkins, under extreme pressure, slipped the information to his contacts in the CIA. He was soon reprimanded by his superiors. An email from his superiors at the Defense Intelligence Security Office warned: "Issues are becoming extremely sensitive as there are foreign policy implications. It is imperative that extra care is taken with the passing of material to the US and Canada."

The CIA was equally upset. When the agents saw what Jenkins handed over, they realized that the Australians had been holding back key information on the movements of Indonesian troops in East Timor. They demanded more documents from Jenkins. He tried to comply, telling his superiors that "the pressure from CIA has been intense and building". But Jenkins didn't know that he was being spied on by his own employees, two uniformed officers who were supposed to be couriers between his office and the CIA.

The two men began opening Jenkins' packets and soon discovered that he was sending AUSTEO documents on East Timor to the CIA. They informed the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, the very same office that suppressed the intelligence reports from Maliana. One of the men, Dennis Magennis, wrote a letter to the Department of Foreign Affairs denouncing Jenkins' ties to the CIA "as barely one step removed from treachery". He said that he could not rule out the use of violence against Jenkins and warned that unless the Department stopped the liaisons "external means must be found."

In any event, an investigation of Jenkins' ties to the CIA was soon launched and, at the end of May 1999, he was hauled in for an interrogation. He came out of the meeting shaken.

"When I first saw him, he was clearly under enormous stress", said Noel Adams, a former Aussie intelligence officer and colleague of Jenkins. "You could see it in his face. His eyes were red-rimmed. It shocked me. I was dismayed to see how he was."

After the session, Jenkins sent an email to his superiors in Canberra saying that he felt he had been abused. He said that he was "angry and frustrated" and wanted to discuss the matter with top agency officials when he returned to Australia in August. He never made it back. Two days after sending this note, he was dead, hanging from a rope in his garage. It was his 48th birthday.

"There's a culture there that excludes people," said Jenkins' mother, Enid. "People who are honest and have integrity. And being accountable for what they've done. And it's the old boy stuff again. You know? Here's the bottle of whiskey. Here's the gun. You know what to do."

CounterPunchers should not conclude that the CIA was somehow wearing the white hat in this dark affair. The Agency wanted more information on the rampages of the Indonesian militias in East Timor, but not in order to stimulate preventative action, but as a quid pro quo for the electronic intercepts the US was furnishing Australia. CP

(**Janitors** *continued from page 1)*

ists were told to go home: Dynes was not there and wouldn't be for an hour. When they persisted, Lo!, Dynes walked out of the tent and said that while he knew nothing about Alejandra Rodriguez or a union organizing drive, he'd get a vice chancellor "right on it". Since they'd already been stalled for three weeks, the students linked arms and tried to march peacefully into the tent to press their demands for, at least, a meeting. At this point, Edgar Gillenwaters, the Senior Director for External Affairs (translation: Continuing Cultivation of the Filthy Rich), was unleashed on the undergrads.

According to the students Gillenwaters and campus security guards shoved four of them into a table of drinks, sending broken glass and hot hors d'oeuvres flying. Gillenwaters elbowed a student in the mouth. Organizer Alex Tom says, "This guy is built like a linebacker. We couldn't believe how he was acting". Blood flowed. One young woman was nearly crushed against a tent pole. Josh Wilson jumped on the open stage and attempted to make the SEJ case: Gillenwaters grabbed his belt and violently heaved him off. Alex Tom was trying to videotape the events, but two men wrapped him up in a tent panel, burrito-style, and tossed him out onto the lawn.

The Chancellor's Associates went back to their mansions, deeply shaken. A week later, this CounterPuncher hiked her 135-lb frame into Gillenwaters's office to see if he was really all that huge, but he was "not in." Big Edgar has refused to return my repeated requests for an interview.

The UCSD administration claims to be neutral in the janitors' fight, but this strains credulity, given their fifteen years of fierce resistance to teaching assistant unionization. (They were finally bested by the UAW last year.) They must have been embarrassed in front of their primo check writers. Several times this spring, they had to watch crowds of nearly 500 students joining the janitors on the campus plazas, holding banners and

(**Janitors** *continued on page 6)*

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cheering to the strains of Latino hip-hop. On June 1, administrators made themselves scarce as hundreds of protestors blocked La Jolla's glacial traffic, and two janitors and thirteen students were arrested. Nervous now, the administrators went a step further.

After the June 1 arrests, they announced that a "whistle blower" had suggested that not all the janitors were legal. They would ask the INS to check. The Union-Tribune published this story on June 2, and it was a bombshell. After heated and public denials by Robert Dynes, his underlings were forced to confirm that they'd indeed called Immigration. Bergenson's Property Services had convinced someone high up in the administration to drop a dime on the janitors.

To understand what a threat this is, you have to understand the workings of the Clinton era Immigration Reform and Control Act. People who've been in the States for decades have been summarily deported, their families broken up, with no recourse or appeal. Others have been incarcerated at Fresno for years without hearings. Citizens, including teen-agers, who look illegal (e.g. speak Spanish only) have been picked up by the INS and dropped off in Tijuana. Papers or no, Mexican and Mexican-American employees quite reasonably see a call to the migra as heavy intimidation.

The INS' job, of course, has always been to help employers keep workers unorganized. But the INS said they wouldn't touch this one with a ten-foot pole. It's illegal for them to intervene in an organizing drive. So UCSD conducted an "internal audit" of citizenship papers. According to Vice Chancellor Stephen Relyea, UCSD felt the need to "exercise due diligence" just now, even though Bergenson's has worked with UCSD for years.

UCSD acted as Bergenson's catspaw. Why? That takes us back to Bob Dynes. Married into an enormously rich family of San Francisco investment bankers, he's also made a pile from investments in Qualcomm and other San Diego high-tech firms; he's tight buddies with real-estate speculators and the owner of the Padres. Dynes was brought in from Bell Labs specifically to help corporatize UCSD, to align its research and teaching more closely with the needs of the high-tech, bio-tech boom on the Mexico-US border.

In exactly the way described by Upton Sinclair in his 1923 classic, The Goosestep: A Study in Higher Education, the Chancellor sees the public university as sharing the political and economic interests of the rest of San Diego's business-military posse. Recently he made a public pronouncement that the UCSD faculty should not produce "knowledge for its own sake" but practical and useful knowledge. When asked by a prominent historian of science what practical project Newton was working on when he theorized gravity, the physicist Dynes called his lawyer before answering.

Given his self-perception as CEO of one of the city's biggest businesses, Dynes can't allow unionization. Except now he has to. On June 14, the University was forced to agree to terminate Bergenson's contract and bring all Bergenson's janitors in under AFSCME, thus doubling their compensation and giving them insurance, vacations and pension benefits. Alejandra Rodriguez will have her job back, and the workers will continue to press their unfair practices complaints. Mike Wilzoch, who ran the campaign for SEIU Local 2028, calls it an unqualified victory. The workers were tough and brave, the students disciplined and tireless, the faculty helpful, and the Chicano Federation and interfaith coalitions just wouldn't drop the issue. And then there was Edgar Gillenwaters, and that dumb, dumb, call to the INS.

When asked by an historian what practical project Newton was working on when he theorized gravity, UCSD's Chancellor called his lawyer before answering.

It's a big win for labor in a county where wins have been few and far between. CounterPunch moral of the story: never overestimate the intelligence of the opposition. CP

Susan Davis *teaches at UC San Diego.*

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Why Bono and U2 Suck

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